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# Bad Comic, Good Comic: The Social Construction of Brownness in the Racial and Ethnic Humor of South Asian Comedians

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**Bad Comic, Good Comic: The Social Construction of Brownness  
in the Racial and Ethnic Humor of South Asian Comedians**

by

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## **Abstract**

The current study aims to compare how South Asian comedians Russell Peters and Hasan Minhaj use racial and ethnic humor to articulate their understandings of Brownness, a tenuous space of both privilege and persecution in North America. Racial and ethnic humor inhabit a contentious continuum that includes exclusionary racist humor, which naturalizes and reiterates racial ideologies, and emancipatory racial humor that exposes and resists dominant power structures. I employ a thematic content analysis of the stand-up comedy shows *Comedy Now!* (2004) and *Hasan Minhaj: Homecoming King* (2017) to argue that the social construction of Brownness in the material of South Asian comedians shapes its propensity for social order and social change. In conclusion, I consider the ideological implications of racial and ethnic humor on the social perceptions of marginalized groups and in public discourses on race and racism.

**Keywords:** South Asians, Brownness, stand-up comedy, racist humor, emancipatory racial humor

## Introduction

Comedy is inextricably linked with structures of power as a form of both cultural affirmation and subversion. Racial and ethnic humor inimitably shape the values, ideologies, and practices of contemporary racial discourse, yet comedy is often overlooked as a serious site for the sociological analysis of racism (Mintz, 1985; Pérez, 2016b). I define racial and ethnic humor<sup>1</sup> here as a type of humor centred on the conditions, behaviour, customs, and any other traits of a racial or ethnic group (Apte, 1987; Green & Linders, 2016).

Emerging scholarship remains divided on how best to examine racial and ethnic humor. Pérez (2016b) asserts that the trend of recent literature has been to applaud comedic heroes who use humor to challenge racism, rather than to chart the evolution of racist humor and its persistence today. Still, the pedagogical utility of emancipatory racial humor to combat hegemonic oppression cannot be undermined. Comedians of color have long used humor to give voice to minority communities that would otherwise have no representation through poignant social commentary on race, ethnicity, and identity.

This trend has continued with the mainstreaming of stand-up comedy and mounting popularity of comedians of South Asian descent like Russell Peters and Hasan Minhaj; however, the efficacy of their material is mitigated by the ambiguous, muddled position of Brownness in the racial structure of North America.<sup>2</sup> While racialization has contributed to reductive images of Brown people as simultaneously whitewashed but foreign, South Asians remain a privileged minority due to the contextual factors and historical legacies of assimilation, immigration, and

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<sup>1</sup> Although I will be exploring both the use of humor and the structure of stand-up comedic performances, I elect to use the term “humor” inclusively to designate the discursive strategies of expression addressing race and ethnicity. Because humor is distinguished as situational whereas comedy constitutes planned entertainment, I employ “comedy” to refer to performance (Rossing, 2014b).

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper, North America refers to Canada and the United States as the literature I have collected is primarily based in these two countries.

legislative policies targeting Brown-skinned ethnoracial groups (Mudambi, 2015). As a result, the disparagement of less advantaged minority groups by those with relatively higher privilege can reactivate racist meaning that feeds into larger practices of social exclusion. The flexibility of this social coloring has important implications for the ways in which South Asian comedians articulate their understandings of Brownness in racial and ethnic identity and relations.

I argue that the social construction of Brownness in the racial and ethnic humor of South Asian comedians shapes its propensity for social order and social change. In the sections that follow, this paper first provides an overview of the contentious continuum of racial and ethnic humor and position of South Asians within this space before delving into the racial formation of Brownness. After a brief review of my methodology, I present a thematic content analysis of the stand-up comedy shows *Comedy Now!* (2004) by Russell Peters and *Hasan Minhaj: Homecoming King* (2017) by Hasan Minhaj. Specifically, I demonstrate how Peters' comedy functions as an instance of racist humor that uses Brownness to foster color consciousness whereas Minhaj's uses Brownness to foster critical consciousness as a form of emancipatory racial humor. In conclusion, I consider the ideological implications of racial and ethnic humor to facilitate both positive and negative racial discourse.

## **Overview of Existing Literature**

### **The Continuum of Racial and Ethnic Humor**

The social functions of comedy for relief, superiority, and incongruity—that is, to reflect, reproduce, or resist asymmetrical power relations respectively—have been well documented in scholarly literature (Billig, 2005; Pérez, 2013; Weaver, 2010a). These functions are not mutually exclusive and frequently overlap due to the polysemicity of humor; this is particularly salient in stand-up comedy as a joke's success is contingent on social setting, delivery, audience reception,

and the insider/outsider status of the comedian (Green & Linders, 2016).

Studies have shown that stand-up comic performances and the role comedians play as public intellectuals produce discourses that can uphold social order or promote social change (Green & Linders, 2016; Pérez, 2013; Pérez, 2017, Weaver 2010a). Consequently, racial and ethnic humor, which is usually incorporated to widen appeal for diverse audiences (Green & Linders, 2016), can both reinforce or challenge notions of racial superiority and inferiority.

There is strong evidence (Billig, 2005; Green & Linders, 2016; Park, Gabbadon, & Chernin, 2006; Weaver, 2011) that humor grants legitimacy to stereotypes regarding racial groups, more so when they adhere to conventional racial narratives. Jokes about a “cheap Jew” or an “angry Black woman,” for example, resonate because they do not deviate from the established racist framing that supports them (Pérez, 2016a; Picca & Feagin, 2007), linking everyday racism at micro levels to larger “racial projects” (Omi & Winant, 2015). More subtle examples of racist humor include the reinforcement of narrow stereotypes in films and television like the *Rush Hour* franchise (Park et al. 2006) and NBC’s *Outsourced* (Antony, 2014) that appear to cater to minorities but in fact deride and further marginalize them. In these cases, the comedian or the media, is rarely deemed racist, as a strong defense of humor stresses its motivational complexity and playful nature; however, Weaver (2010b) maintains that racist meaning is generated despite the intentionality of the comic rather than because of it.

Racial accountability is also nullified by the current post-Jim Crow era of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2013, 2015) and political correctness (Pérez, 2016b). The constraints on public racism have led to the rise of discursive strategies that allow comedians to rebuff malicious intent while still engaging in open racial critique (Pérez, 2013). Additionally, any criticism surrounding the circulation of racial and ethnic humor is seen as an attack on free speech

grounded in hypersensitivity and intellectual censorship. Many high-profile comedians, like Jerry Seinfeld and Chris Rock (Schwarz, 2015), have spoken against political correctness as antithetical to the goal of comedy: laughter. Such exculpatory approaches to humor enable comedians to uncritically excuse systemic and cultural oppression under a superficial veneer of progressiveness. For these reasons, Weaver (2010a) altogether rejects the term racial and ethnic humor in favour of “racist humor,” declaring that “where humor has a racist potential, in relation to stereotype and inferiorization used, it remains accurate to label it racist humor” (p. 537)

While I agree that racist humor reifies racial sentiments under the guise of comedy, I continue to use the term racial and ethnic humor for my investigation, though I apply the term racist humor where relevant. My intent here is not to minimize the destructive consequences of racist humor, but to emphasize that humor, when wielded correctly, has the capacity for social, political, and cultural change, as I will explore. Laughter alone is not justifiable reasoning to assuage the impact of racist jokes on the personal well-being and the social perceptions of the disenfranchised, for expression and enjoyment of racist jokes are but exhibitions of power that reproduce and sustain oppression. Nonetheless, racial and ethnic humor has a crucial role in rupturing taboos and resolving social differences, as I describe below.

Similarly, Rossing (2014a) argues that racial and ethnic humor is best described as a continuum given its considerable potential to counteract social injustice. Humor can be “emancipatory” by promoting critical readings of dominant ideologies when comedians perform their marginality on stage and reflect on racial oppression. Rossing advocates for the use of emancipatory racial humor as critical public pedagogy (Giroux, 2000; Rossing, 2016), a form of widely available education that defies racial knowledge and practices in service of counterhegemonic struggle. He posits that “by fostering critical consciousness about racial



identity, racism, and privilege, such humor could help people identify, criticize, and ultimately begin to transform hegemonic racism.” (Rossing, 2016, p. 615). While some may argue that this kind of humor belongs in a classroom rather than a comedy club, socially conscious comedic dialogue can provide sociological insight on power, authority, and social inequality in a more appealing, accessible, and broadly dispersed manner than traditional academia.

To be clear, Rossing (2014a, 2016) does not claim that mere exposure to racial humor directly translates into progressive action or dismantles racism, but that humor can be a vital component of socio-political activism. Comically styled advocacy can uncover the harsh realities of racism to audiences previously unaware and cultivate solidarity among minorities through shared experiences of marginalization. Emancipatory racial humor contributes to civic education by capitalizing on media production and circulation to provoke conversations about race that may inspire long-term change.

The use of resistance humor to oppose White supremacy dates back hundreds of years among Black communities in the United States (Rossing, 2013; Weaver, 2010b), but went public with the brazen, racially charged performances of Dick Gregory and Richard Pryor in the 1960s and 1970s. Through humorous disarmament, Gregory and Pryor made visible institutionalized power dynamics, creating conditions for the possibility of social transformation. This work has continued into the modern day with the likes of Dave Chappelle, Whoopi Goldberg, and Chris Rock, and more recently, South Asian comedians, Russell Peters and Hasan Minhaj.

South Asian representation in mainstream comedy begins with Peters, who received international fame when pirated clips of his Canadian television special *Comedy Now!* (2004) went viral online. His stand-up shows use observational humor to highlight the racial, ethnic, class, and cultural differences of minority groups, the inspiration for which comes primarily

from his experiences as a second-generation, Christian, Anglo-Indian Canadian born and raised in Brampton, Ontario. Brayton (2009) writes: “his shtick, in other words, is the ethnolinguistic imitation of himself and his viewers, which doubles as a rich commentary on racism and identity politics” (p. 102). Peters’ racial and ethnic humor has undoubtedly given much-needed visibility to minorities—Filipinos, South Africans, Vietnamese, Nigerians, and of course, Indians, to name a few—and paved the way for rising comedian Hasan Minhaj to take the stage.

Minhaj has gained worldwide recognition for his politically and socially conscious dialogue on race-relations, immigration, and Islamophobia from his work on *The Daily Show* from 2014-2018, monologue at the 2017 White House Correspondents’ Dinner, and Netflix stand-up special *Hasan Minhaj: Homecoming King* (2017). Like Peters, Minhaj’s material is driven by his Muslim upbringing and experiences as second-generation Indian American born and raised in Davis, California. His unconventional show focuses on his adolescence as he navigates identity, race, and culture while dealing with the coming-of-age angst of relationships, heartache, and forgiveness.

While there are many prominent South Asian comedians, Peters and Minhaj were chosen for this study due to: their focus on race and ethnicity; prominence inside and outside the South Asian community; and influence on comedy, with Peters as the first and arguably biggest South Asian comic, and Minhaj, the most promising South Asian comic of contemporary North America media.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Social Construction of Brownness in North America**

I use the term “South Asian” in this study to fall in line with scholars that refer to a shared

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<sup>3</sup>Aziz Ansari, arguably the most well-known South Asian comic today, was not selected for study as his material centres more on modern romance and dating culture, rather than race and ethnicity. Hari Kondabolu also focuses on

historical connection and cultural similarities to the Indian subcontinent, which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Davé, 2013; Thakore, 2016). I engage with the concept of Brownness in two ways: to refer, both racially and culturally, to South Asians in the same manner as Peters and Minhaj, which I elaborate on in later sections, and to denote the social coloring and “‘middling’ positionality” (Mudambi, 2015, p. 44) of South Asians in the racial structure of North America. As Allahar (1993) writes, racist ideas have evolved utilizing the color symbolisms of historical and sociopolitical practices to inform racialization into the modern era.

The ambiguity of Brownness shapes how South Asians maneuver the tenuous boundaries of race, racialization, social order, and social change, as “Brown” in contemporary society is typically conflated with “South Asian” (Zopf, 2018) and in the United States. This is largely because the experiences of South Asians are either lumped together as “Indian” (Davé, 2013), forgotten under the umbrella term “Asian,” or erased altogether by the Black/White binary that dominates conceptions of race in North America (Mudambi, 2015; Perea, 1997). As a result, Brownness is imbued with the popular, limited characterizations of South Asians as overtly ethnic, model minorities, assimilated or “whitewashed”, and violent terrorists amid longstanding Orientalist undercurrents of alterity, monolithic backwardness, tradition, and reluctance to change (Said, 1978; Thakore, 2016)

In North America, the term “Brown” has historically been used to racialize any groups that “defy straightforward racial classification...based on skin color and phenotype” (Zopf, 2018, p. 178), such as Latino/as, South Asians, Muslims/Middle Easterners/Arabs (Mudambi, 2015), and even Native Americans in popular media, among others. Mudambi (2015) speculates

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race and ethnicity, but is less prominent than Minhaj (Thakore, 2016). Danny Bhoy was not selected as he is based in

that this categorical flexibility indicates the association of Brownness with otherness rather than a unified collective identity based on regional proximity or ethnocultural overlap. Furthermore, the standing of these groups in North America has fluctuated depending on the sociopolitical context of issues such as immigration, war, and terrorism.

Race scholars have suggested that racial hierarchy of North America is transitioning into a three-tiered system, comprising Whites at the top, collective Blacks at the bottom, and honorary Whites in the middle (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Kim, 1999). Kim (1999) theorizes that Asian Americans—Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, among others—who are racially categorized as “yellow” (Bonilla-Silva, 2004), are triangulated between Blacks and Whites due to their perceived superiority as high-achieving, productive, and passive “model” minorities (Daga & Raval, 2018; Thakore, 2016) over Blacks but inferiority as forever foreigners (Tuan, 1999), regardless of citizenship and/or socioeconomic status. Lighter skin tone, higher social class, and even certain facial features can help to “whiten” this position so long as individuals have no other outward signifiers of religious or cultural affiliation (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Thakore, 2016). In the case of South Asians, a longstanding emphasis on educational capital as a requirement for migrant entry and assimilation, as well as the strength of cultural and religious values that centre community, family, and tradition, have enabled their upward social mobility (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Daga & Raval, 2018; Davé, 2013).

South Asians are thus a privileged minority whose subordinated racial status is masked by their valorization when compared with other racial and ethnic groups, like Blacks. Within Brownness, however, there are still shades of difference due to the prevalence of colorism within South Asian culture and society (Thakore, 2016). While some individuals may benefit from a

light-skinned privilege, others with a darker complexion that may physically look Black and be stigmatized within the South Asian community, can still identify as Brown in North America the basis of their heritage, clinging to their Brownness as a symbolic distinguisher of social status and cultural differences. The social coloring of Brown as *not Black* thus affords South Asians a place of relative advantage that their skin colour alone does not allot them.

At the same time, the post-9/11 backlash has strengthened notions of the Brown body “as a foreign and menacing Other against which the normalized White body must be protected” (Mudambi, 2015, p. 47). Quite simply, Brownness is fundamentally a condition of in-betweenness (Gilroy, 2005). To be Brown is to be a racial intermediary—to inhabit a paradox of being simultaneously wanted and unwanted in a society polarized by Whiteness and Blackness.

Following these insights, I demonstrate how racial and ethnic humor in the hands of South Asian comedians perpetuates and resists racist discourse depending on how Brownness is used to legitimize or challenge racial ideologies. In so doing, I contribute to the growing body of literature on the collective practices of minorities that reinforce contemporary racial order.

### **Methodology**

This study will employ a qualitative content analysis to compare and contrast the use of racial and ethnic humor in the stand-up comedy shows *Comedy Now!* (2004) by Russell Peters and *Hasan Minhaj: Homecoming King* (2017). Although there is a gap of fourteen years between the release of these shows, both were selected because they launched the careers of their respective comedians and have enjoyed immense popularity since. The recordings of both shows were obtained online, where they are available to the public: *Comedy Now!* can be found on the video-sharing website Dailymotion and *Homecoming King* is offered on the subscription-based streaming service Netflix.

Content analysis was chosen for its emphasis on the significance of context to communication. In stand-up comedy, the use of language to represent the comedian's reality makes it a vehicle for action (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). This study is both descriptive and exploratory in nature due to the existing literature on racial and ethnic humor, yet gaps in research on South Asian comedians. Data were collected through a combination of both directed and summative content analysis methods (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)—a two-pronged approach that relies on both pre-existing analytical categories and themes that emerge from the data (Green & Linders, 2016; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). This method allowed me to extend established conceptual frameworks on racist humor and emancipatory racial humor to a new area of study, as a traditionally deductive approach would obscure the contextual aspects of humor as used by South Asians.

Data were collected and coded in three phases—each show was viewed three times in total and transcribed verbatim to strengthen the analysis. After familiarizing myself with relevant research, I generated some initial coding categories and added more as they became apparent. Notes were made on the comedians' body language, joke delivery, tone, structure, audience response, and word usage. All references were listed, counted, and organized by theme (see Appendix Figures 1-2) to draw connections between concepts and sub-concepts.

To analyze the findings, I examined the structure, narrative scaffolding, lexicons, and themes within and across both shows to interpret their explicit and implicit meanings. The central limitation of this study is that I was the sole coder; however, to maintain the integrity of the coding process, I watched the each show multiple times and immersed myself in as much literature as possible. In addition, while my background as a young, second-generation South Asian Muslim woman may be cause for bias, I contend that it brings added perspective, as a

researcher of a different background may not have readily detected some of the nuances of Peters' and Minhaj's jokes.<sup>4</sup>

## Findings and Discussion

### ***Comedy Now!: The Logic of Racist Humor***

Peters' narrow treatment of Brownness enables his disparagement of other marginalized groups with minimal backlash. He mentions "Indians" forty-two times over the course of the show. The term "South Asian" is used once, "Brown" six times, and "immigrant" four times. Peters also mistakenly refers to the principal language of India as "Indian"—there is no language by that name—rather than Hindi. On a surface level, the use of "Indian" seems innocuous, but in conjunction with Peters' restrictive depictions of Brownness, it signifies a racial lumping that homogenizes and underpins ideas of his own community of South Asians as only Indian.

In *Comedy Now!*, Peters asserts that Indians violently discipline their children, are incapable of physical labour, and make poor athletes, but are adept at taxes. He speaks of cheapness as infused in their blood, a likeness that cements it as innate to Indianness.

Hilarity surrounding these stereotypes mostly arises from his performance of the "Indian" accent, which includes a mixture of uniquely stressed syllables, misarranged words, cultural expressions, and stylized, broken English. At times the audience does not immediately laugh at his joke until Peters inserts the accent, established early on as a basis for laughter. In one bit, he explains his reasoning as to why the accent is so amusing:

Just so you guys know, Indian people are fully aware of what their accent sounds like. We don't actually need *you (laughter)*... We know exactly what it sounds like. We know it's not the coolest accent in the world, you know. You're never gonna see two Indian guys in a club standing around going (*in accent*) 'Hey man,

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<sup>4</sup> Examples include Minhaj's references to South Asian pop culture, Muslim colloquialisms (such as "IA", an abbreviation for Arabic saying "Inshallah" or "*By the grace of Allah*"), and the Hindi language, which I understand.

aren't we cool? (*laughs*) Don't we sound really hip? We are going to meet all the bitches tonight. I'm pimpin' (*he jumps, followed by audience laughter*).

Peters seemingly provides Indian people with a sense of agency by confirming their awareness of the accent, as if they too are in on the joke, but still encourages laughter. His use of "we" in the above passage is particularly ironic because he neither has an accent himself nor does he include similar assimilated Indian characters in his show. All Indians except for Peters, regardless of their background or generational status, must have the accent.

His portrayal of the accent also reinforces longstanding images of Asian men as effeminate, sexually inept, and unworthy of attraction, as seen in the passage below:

...But Indian people know what their accent is good for and what it's not good for. We know its limitations. And I mean we know it's not good for, for getting laid. It's not gonna help you (*leans forward, purses lips, tilts head down, adopts accent*) 'Hello baby' (*laughter*). Nothing's gonna happen for ya.

The repeated use of the word "never" in the last two passages confers a finality on the inherent incompetence and undesirability of Indian men, who will never be able to transcend their accent and thus, their Indianness. The recurring delivery of the accent with humorous facial expressions projects a comicality to the audience:

But you know what the Indian accent is good for? Cutting tension. You've got a tense situation...pop in the Indian accent. Tension's gone (*snaps fingers*). Picture a serious courtroom drama, (*stern facial expression*) 'Your honor, my client... (*switches to a comical facial expression and adopts accent*) would like to plead guilty! (*laughter*). Tension's gone!'

The general mockery of accents is not in and of itself racist, but Peters' attachment of the accent as intrinsic to and inseparable from one's Indianness participates in the same erasure of cultural hybridity as his exclusive use of "Indian." His mimicked accent in these bits is a form of Brown voice that amplifies difference in the racialization of South Asians (Davé, 2013). Brown voice (Thakore, 2016) is defined as "the act of speaking in accented English associated with Indian



nationals and immigrants and is a combination of linguistic and phonetic markers that include stress points on particular words, cultural references, and words out of order” (Davé, 2017, p. 143). According to Davé (2013), accents are signifiers of difference and can help to racialize groups that have historically been difficult to classify, particularly when attached to bodies of color. White individuals with accents are still perceived as foreign, but desirable rather than inferior due to the social coloring of their skin color. Peters’ performance treats not only South Asians as a source of ridicule and humor for being harsh parents, docile, lazy, cheap, and sexually inept, but his Brown voice suggests a verbal inadequacy and, thus inferiority, that is natural to Brownness.

Ironically, even Peters’ attempts to uplift other groups, like Jamaican and Jewish people, centre on their appeal over Indians. The bulk of the show comprises Peters’ observations on the linguistic and cultural barriers in the interactions of ethnic groups. While he occasionally speaks on White Canadians in this way—having an accent and being lax on their children—most of his humor is aimed at minorities. He makes several mentions of different groups and parodies Indian, South African, Italian, Jamaican, Chinese, Canadian, and Jewish peoples, among others. Nonetheless, much like his depiction of Indians, Peters’ impersonations descend into regressive ethnic performances due to his overreliance on heavily caricatured stereotypes and stylized English—there are no points in which he discusses a racial or ethnic group without adopting an accent. Two notable instances of this are his portrayals of Jamaican and Chinese peoples.

Jamaicans are mentioned twenty-one times in *Comedy Now!*, first introduced when Peters criticizes White people for their confusion of Jamaicans and South Africans. He later begins another joke by describing his childhood ambition to become Jamaican:

When I was growing up around Jamaicans...you hang around Jamaican people long enough, you feel the need to want to be Jamaican. They just look so cool,

everything about them is cool! (*some chuckles*) When I was a kid, I wanted to be Jamaican so bad. I started dressing like a Jamaican. I started wearing a little red, yellow, and green belt. I started talking like a Jamaican. I started listening to reggae music. I started having kids I didn't know about (*shocked laughter*). I did everything that I possibly could.

The joke appears to be complimentary, but its punchline supports racial stereotypes of Black people as hypersexual and irresponsible. Interestingly, the audience does not laugh at the build-up of this joke until Peters mentions children. In fact, they are generally reluctant to laugh at any jokes about Black people, which Peters observes in an earlier bit. This is followed by a casual affirmation that he is not intimidated by Black people, having grown up around them in what he describes as a multicultural environment. Peters later uses this same rationale to insist that Jamaicans beat their kids for no reason, unlike other ethnic groups who do it for discipline.

Chinese people are similarly characterized. Peters mentions them twenty-four times and regularly assumes a “Chinese” accent in a manner akin to his Indian accent. Much like with Jamaicans, Peters’ intention seems to be the subversion of prejudicial thinking—he initially points out how smart he believes Chinese people are and how well they speak English compared to Indians. In one encounter, he recounts his difficulty bartering with a Chinese man:

...I go ‘Alright, well give me a deal on the purse, I don’t wanna pay 35 bucks.’... (*in accent*) ‘Okay, you seem like nice guy. I give you best price. \$34.50.’ (*laughs*). I’m like ‘That’s fifty cents man.’ He goes (*in accent*) ‘Fifty cents a lot of money. You save fifty cents here, then maybe you go somewhere else, you save another fifty cents. Then you have one dollar! (*laughs*) Then you take your dollar, you go to the dollar store, you buy something else!’ (*audience cheers*)

The above set has become one of Peters’ signatures and unlike his jokes on Jamaicans, audiences display no hesitance in their unabashed amusement at this impersonation. Alongside Peters’ accented English, bits on the “Chinese names” of his viewers, and use of the slur “Chinaman”—whether or not he is aware of its racist origins is unclear—echo widespread representations of Chinese people as cunning, deviant, and inassimilable foreigners (Zhang, 2010) that have no

place in Canada, per the long history of anti-Chinese immigration sentiment (Coloma, 2013).

The personal repercussions of Peters' humor are downplayed by his Brownness, through which he can deny racism on the claim that people of colour, South Asians in particular, cannot be racist as victims of oppression themselves. This is a simplistic version of racism that ignores the variations of bigotry and long history of Brown racism that includes both admonishment towards darker skin and the billion-dollar skin-bleaching and whitening industries (Thakore, 2016; Washington, 1990). Moreover, the relative privilege of Peters' Brownness as a model minority has the added effect of authenticating stereotypes directed at groups positioned lower than him in the racial structure. Motapanye (2011) ties this to his ability to humorously voice known "racial truths" that are not considered socially acceptable with the restrictions of political correctness, for which Peters admittedly cares little (Sung, 2017).

Indeed, audiences might be more inclined to find assurance in racial stereotypes than to doubt them due to the authority of Peters' insider status. This is illustrated in the warm reception to his jokes on Indian and Chinese people and hesitant or delayed laughter to material on Jamaicans or Jewish people; however, neither Peters nor his audiences are viewed as racist by the general public, his impressions seen as too accurate to be construed as anything but celebratory (Brayton, 2009; Hirji, 2009). As such, Peters upholds the social order of White supremacy by legitimizing the subordination of racial and ethnic minorities, like East and South Asians who serve no purpose beyond comic relief.

Therefore, Peters' portrayal of what he views as innate cultural distinctions signify a racist humor that naturalizes differences and replicates social stratification. Though he avoids open ridicule of specific groups, his embellished accents and enactment of racial and ethnic traits are a form of cultural racialization that has long been used to justify racial essentialism. Accents

are steeped in legacies of racial impersonation and linked to a set of anticipated performative cultural markers that connote foreignness, non-belonging, and deviation from true Americanness. Peters' ethnic performances and vocal imitations allow the audience to effectively see and hear race and ethnicity as non-normative and other, transforming cultural differences into racial deficiencies.

Self-deprecation is his primary point of entry to the disparagement of other racial and ethnic groups, which always begins with comparison to Indian people. Jokes that would otherwise be labelled racist are deflated by Peters' mockery of his own community, a horizontal hostility that enables negative presentation of other groups given that he is harshest on Indians. Peters' also applies a multiculturalist logic of inclusion to make his racial discourse palatable, believing his diverse upbringing absolves his comedy of social harms. Where these strategies fail, he injects sexual humor<sup>5</sup> to build a relaxed and informal rapport with viewers through a cross-cultural common ground of human sexuality. This aura of informality is bolstered by: the minimalism of Peters' design, production, and direction; his crass and laid-back demeanor; the lack of transitions between his jokes and structure in his content overall<sup>6</sup>, enforcing his show as an effortlessly casual and carefree environment where any and all jokes are permissible.

As such, any racist culpability is absolved by virtue of his Brownness, as Peters insists his minority status, multiculturalism, and general crudeness permit him to poke fun at all minority groups with ease. Though Peters may be able to make jokes about Brown people by virtue of his Brownness, it does not give him license to enact degrading and regressive stereotypes of communities that are not his own, especially when he lacks the historicity and

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<sup>5</sup> This includes, but is not limited to, mentions of casual sex, genitalia, and various sexual acts.

<sup>6</sup> In many cases, Peters jumps into a new set with no prior build-up or backstory after the audience's laughter from the previous joke has died down.

context behind them and the ways in which Brown people have benefited and continue to benefit from the ongoing disenfranchisement of other groups. Furthermore, he does not seem to recognize that the satire and commentary he is attempting to create for shock value only serves to perpetuate racist stereotypes and validate their usage by White audiences on a mass level.

By focusing on difference, Peters' comedy ultimately rests on historical and cultural ignorance and color-consciousness (Pérez, 2017) in which race is made visible through stereotypes, imagery, and voice. Racist humor persists under the premise of comedy as light-hearted anecdotal entertainment that suspends critical thinking and judgement. This not only prevents spectators from acknowledging their own racism but impedes public discourse and collective efforts against structural and material inequalities.

### ***Homecoming King: Emancipatory Racial Humor***

Minhaj is less controversial but equally as subversive in his comedic structure, style, and material on the daily manifestations of racism through the lens of Brownness. One of the chief differences between *Comedy Now!* and *Homecoming King* is the structure of each show. *Comedy Now!* is mostly observational, whereas *Homecoming King* is more theatrical and introspective, a live memoir on Minhaj's personal history. Minhaj cohesively constructs a narrative much like a comedic essay: the first half of the show covers his background and the Brownness of his upbringing while the second half takes a more serious turn and delves into how these experiences have shaped his life following 9/11.

Minhaj's depiction of South Asians is less restrictive and displays the multiplicity of the Brown identity by challenging dominant tropes of racialization. He opts for the term "Brown", mentioned twenty-two times, over Peters' preferred choice of "Indian", which Minhaj only uses seven times. Mentions of all racial categories also decrease in frequency after the halfway mark

of the show; once the initial context has been established, Minhaj relies less on racial and ethnic labels as reminders of difference to continue his story.

Rather than mock his own people, Minhaj chastises non-South Asians for any assumption of sameness by virtue of skin colour and differentiates between Hindus and Muslims with a series of visual aids. He touches on racialization again when describing his trepidation over inviting high school crush Bethany Reed to his house to study, a fear of rejection stemming from years of bullying by his classmates due to his heritage and culture.

What, invite you over to my house? Yeah, come on in! You walk in (*slow voice*) 'Uhhhh what language are you guys speaking? You guys watch movies? Who's in the movie? What's that smell?' I'm not going to open myself up to that ridicule right. But I was like, 'No, she's different.'

Minhaj also debunks the myth of the effeminate Asian man by sharing his first forays into high school dating, attributing his inability to do so to the strictness of his conservative parents as opposed to his Indianness.

...Especially in middle school, if a girl called the house, are you kidding me? You had to pick up the phone before your parents...And I remember one time in middle school a girl called the house. I raced to the phone, but my dad picked it up before me. He's like 'Hello, who is this?' 'Hi, it's Alice. Is Hasan there?' 'What do you want, Alice?' I was like, 'Great, I'm going to die a virgin.' (*laughter*) 'Um, I'm in Geometry with Hasan. I had a question for him. Can I ask him the question?' He's like, 'Okay, Alice. Why don't you ask me the question, then I'll ask Hasan?' (*laughter*)

The passage above highlights Minhaj's desire for physical intimacy, but in no way implies that Brownness is the cause of it. Alternatively, he points out the commonalities of his experience with countless others of his generation and thereby, creates a counternarrative contrary to the sexual inadequacy society has ascribed to South Asians. Minhaj's Brownness is merely one facet of his relatable coming-of-age story for audiences across all backgrounds.

In many regards, Minhaj seems to celebrate Brownness with nods to South Asian culture,

ranging from biryani to Fair and Lovely to Zee TV to films like *Jodhaa Akbar*. He also speaks in Hindi—Minhaj’s family hails from India—throughout the show, usually when describing interactions with his parents, after which he provides an English translation. South Asians in the audience react with instant laughter if they understand Hindi or the context of the joke, while the response of non-South Asians is delayed until his explanation. Moreover, Minhaj remarkably never adopts a mimicked Indian accent in the style of Brown voice when impersonating his father and sister, whose first language is Hindi, though he may take on a deeper or more feminine tone to imitate them.

In these instances, the content of Minhaj’s joke rather than an accent or the Hindi language itself is the source of laughter. Because accents act as a constant reminder of difference, the use of non-accented English precludes the audience from associating Brownness with comedy. For non-South Asians, Hindi in this show can be representative of the language and communicative barriers they may face with their own families. Minhaj’s fluency and ability to switch seamlessly between two languages also alludes to the fluidity of his own bicultural identity, like the children of many immigrants who grow up at the periphery of two often conflicting cultures. Ultimately, Minhaj’s references to South Asian conventions, use of Hindi, and exclusion of an “Indian” accent enhance the authenticity of his story and intimacy with fellow South Asians by connecting with them on a cultural level without deriding them.

Despite his focus on race and ethnicity, Minhaj rarely names other ethnic groups; if mentioned, they are never the explicit focus of his jokes, are discussed positively or, where relevant, brought up in a way that recognizes their marginalization. For example, Minhaj briefly speaks on the talent of Russian gymnasts, the internment of the Japanese in America and Canada, and the animosity of Fox News towards Arabs and Mexicans.

In place, he fuses his personal history with the broader political and social context of race relations to confront both blatant and subtle forms of racism, calling out the privilege and entitlement that shapes the way Whites and people of color take up space in the world. He notes his childhood aspiration for Whiteness after being bullied on the playground and his avoidance of his newly-arrived immigrant sister in the hopes of gaining acceptance from White peers. This is a marked contrast to Peters who instead wanted to be Jamaican.

In one of the show's more somber moments, Minhaj's vibrant exterior shifts to a still calm as he details the antagonism his family faced in the wake of 9/11—hate calls, racial slurs, theft, and the vandalism of their car.

And I know 9/11 is a super touchy subject. I understand. Because when it happened, everyone in America felt like their country was under attack. But on that night, September 12th, it was the first night of so many nights where I felt like my family's love and loyalty to this country was under attack. And it always sucks. As immigrants we always have to put on these press releases to prove our patriotism. We're always auditioning, like 'We love this country, please believe me.'

He links the divergence between his fury and his father's stoic composure in response to the attacks to generational divide and engages in compelling and relevant debate surrounding racism; this bit receives by far the loudest applause and support from the audience. Minhaj explains that his parents, like many first-generation immigrants, cared little for identity politics over financial security or basic racial tolerance—an American Dream tax, so to speak. Accepting racism was a necessary exchange for survival and safe refuge from their dangerous and war-torn homeland, an acquiescence Minhaj, who is still denied the equality that is his birthright, cannot himself fathom or comply with:

...and my dad is from that generation like a lot of immigrants where he feels like if you come to this country, you pay this thing like the American Dream tax, right? Like you're gonna endure some racism, and if it doesn't cost you your life, well, hey you lucked out, pay it. There you go, Uncle Sam. But for me, like



a lot of us, I was born here. So I actually have the audacity of equality. ...Life, liberty, pursuit of happiness. All men created equal. It says it right here, I'm equal. I'm equal! I don't deserve this. (*deafening applause*)

The use of the word “immigrant” in the last two passages is significant here. Even though Minhaj brings up 9/11, there are no other racial signifiers—most immigrants can relate to the frustration of having to prove their belonging in a society that centres Whiteness. “Immigrant” allows Minhaj to make parallels between various marginalized groups in the United States and unify their shared struggles of social inequality under a collective identity.

Minhaj draws on collectivity again in the show's title bit. He cites his rejection by Bethany Reed, who, in spite of her feelings for Minhaj, changed her date last minute to appease her parents, an example of the internalized racism that added to his existing insecurity as a Brown man:

I'd eaten off their plates. I'd kissed their daughter. I didn't know that people could be bigoted even as they were smiling at you. It's hard to understand when you see people saying they love you but they're afraid at the same time. (*somber claps*)

He vividly recaps the sense of adolescent anticipation leading up to the event; how he defied his parents by sneaking out of his room, fervently biked over to Bethany's house in his suit, and upon arrival, discovered another boy—a White boy—already there placing a corsage on her wrist. Drawing on universal feelings of first love and crushing heartbreak, for Whites in the audience, this story may illuminate the insidious and unjust incongruities surrounding both public and private value judgements on the basis of race.

While Minhaj speaks at length about racialization and racism, he takes the time to admit his relative privilege as a Brown man in North America:

‘Awww oh, you couldn't go to prom with a White girl?’ Who gives a fuck? At least your spine isn't getting shattered in the back of a police wagon, the way it's happening to my African-American brothers and sisters in this country to this

day. (*applause, audience cheers*) So this is a tax you have to pay for being here? I'll pay it. 'I can't date your daughter.' I don't give a fuck, Uncle Sam. Take it...For every Trayvon Martin or Ahmed the clock kid, there are shades of bigotry that happen every day between all of us. Because we're too afraid to let go of this idea of the Other. Someone who's not in our tribe, you're Other.

While his Brownness makes him target for discrimination, Minhaj insinuates that it also provides him with social privilege and protects him from the systemic racism and police brutality endured by Black people for which there is no equivalence. In this moment, he is able to speak on his own experiences without dismissing or taking away from the oppression of others, a self-awareness crucial to building communities in the face of subjugation.

Thus, Minhaj's racial and ethnic humor creatively exposes, destabilizes, and dissents against the prevailing power relationships and identity constructions that sustain racial oppression as commonsense knowledge. His material departs from traditional stand-up in that it avoids cartoonish accents and ethnic characterizations. He neither speaks on behalf of other groups nor does he rely on cheap comedic tricks to elicit laughter at the expense of marginalized; this is a conscious effort on Minhaj's part to "not to push down on groups that are already being objectified" (Canieso, 2016). Instead, he uses his adolescence to foreground a multifaceted counternarrative of Brownness that resists flat stereotypes of fanaticism, violence, and otherness.

His nuanced storytelling is amplified by the direction and production of the show, which strategically work together to elicit an emotional response from the audience or intensify its impact. Viewers can see his wide-eyed surprise and feel his anger due to the unique cinematography that frequently has Minhaj addressing the camera directly. He also uses a mix of photos and video clips projected on a screen behind him to cushion his material, which is peppered with hundreds of sharp pop culture references. This appears to have great effect as the

jokes garnering the most laughter are the ones where Minhaj uses these references to describe the strictness of his parents or his interactions with Bethany beyond high school. His rapid-fire delivery, use of relevant analogies and metaphors, and compelling, quieter moments of vulnerability create a sense of realism and encourage contemplation beyond the immediate comedic context.

Minhaj transcends racial difference by inviting people to connect over common issues, as many of the subjects he touches on—religious tensions, generational divide, and bicultural identity—are applicable to numerous migrant communities. He also does not use his middled Brownness to diminish or erase the oppression of other groups; this is evident in the acknowledgement of his privilege, which despite his racialization as a terrorist, protects him from attack as a Brown man. By focusing on similarities over than differences, Minhaj taps into the audience's shared humanity, compassion, and empathy to build intimacy with them rather than ridicule them.

His material is emancipatory in that it provokes a deeper, sophisticated engagement of issues like racial identity, power, and privilege to unveil the character of domination. He uses laughter, lightness, and narrative prowess to make serious points—an activist, educative commentary that promotes critical, public consciousness to contest racial injustices. In this manner, humor provides pedagogical possibilities for acceptance and pluralism by fostering cross-racial understanding and inspiring coalition towards counterhegemonic struggle.

### **Conclusion and Implications for Future Research**

Through the lens of Brownness, this study has demonstrated the color-consciousness of Peters' racist humor in comparison with the critical consciousness of Minhaj's emancipatory racial humor, two of many ways in which South Asian comedians can brandish the constant fluidity of

Brownness towards the both social order and social change.

In *Comedy Now!*, the exaggerated simplicity and totalizing nature of Peters' Brownness misrepresents the sociocultural intricacies of modern society. His candid and unapologetic comedy fills a deeper void across many racial and ethnic groups to be able to laugh at themselves<sup>7</sup> (Apte, 1987; Hirji, 2009) but his problematic material, which frequently pushes the boundaries of acceptable racialized discourse, has greater implications for the reiteration of racial ideologies. The effects of his jokes are threefold: they reveal the interpretive tension about viewers, who lacking prior cultural knowledge of root contexts and the issues at stake, may misinterpret the humor and have their own racist stereotypes reinforced; they strengthen contemporary racial hierarchies that maintain racism can only be perpetrated by White people and is no longer a pressing issue, except in extreme and isolated incidents (Pérez, 2017); and they allow Peters to reach for Whiteness by "skewering ethnic identities" (Sung, 2017) to cater to mainstream audiences. Peters' attempted subversion towards resistant sociality instead justifies continued discrimination since he does not prioritize social justice over laughter.

Conversely, Minhaj's humor subverts the "natural" by refusing hegemonic racial constructions and recontextualizing dominant narratives of Brownness in America. Where Peters uses Brownness and accented English to exacerbate differences, Minhaj directs it toward cutting social analysis on the examined ordinariness of privilege, power relationships, and institutional racism (Rossing, 2014a). He reclaims his agency through humor, heartfelt comedy and experiential truths to reimagine varied, intersectional identities and create opportunities for transformative action.

Minhaj bridges divides and overcomes barriers to identification because his

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<sup>7</sup> According to Hough (2009), "Russell Peters got rich and famous by capitalizing on the fact that yellow, brown and

counternarrative resonates with broader, humanizing experiences of discrimination—commonalities born from a context of difference (Rossing, 2013, 2014a). In a style that is less confrontational and more invitational, his emancipatory racial humor facilitates sociological thinking by deconstructing social life in a more captivating and publicly accessible way to the masses than academic sociology. This kind of creative intervention can unite and mobilize communities beyond Brown people in understanding and purpose towards antiracism, activism, and non-violent protest (Rossing, 2013).

In light of these findings, future studies may consider: delving deeper into the work of other prominent comedians of color to see how racial and ethnic humor reflect individual dealings and structural framings of race and racial intermediary groups; assessing the impact of humor on actual racial and ethnic discourse among minority groups in the current changing racial landscape; and finally, exploring how to best inform meaningful everyday interactions so that the appearance of racial unity in comedic settings is not shallow and short-lived (Green & Linders, 2016), for jokes at the expense of the marginalized are but expressions of oppressive power.

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black people want to laugh at yellow, brown and black people” (para. 1).

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## Appendix

**Appendix Figure 1** – The coding chart for *Comedy Now!*

Category	Joke Example	Frequency	Additional Notes
Places	India, South Africa, England, South Africa, South Africa, South Africa, Jamaica, South Africa, South Africa, South Africa, Canada, South Africa, Pacific Mall, India, South Africa, South Africa, Italy, Italy, Italy, Italy, Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong, South Africa, England, Hong Kong, Filipino woman, Holland, Cuba, Iceland, Ukraine	South Africa – 11 Hong Kong – 6 Italy – 4 England – 2 India – 2 Canada – 1 Cuba – 1 Holland – 1 Iceland – 1 Jamaica – 1 Pacific Mall – 1 Philippines – 1 Ukraine – 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentions traveling a lot</li> </ul>
Racial and Ethnic Categories / Racial Slurs	Indian, gay Indian guys, three gay Indian guys, we are Indian and we are gay, gay South Asian community, they are of the gay, we should not have gay Indians, Indian men should not be gay, Indian family realizes their son is gay, Indian, Indian community, Black people's motherland, I'm Indian and we have our own motherland, drunk White lady, African, there was Indian people, Indian people, longer than White people in Canada, Indian people taken to Africa, who uses an Indian slave, my people my people, alright Raj, Indian athletes, Indians in the NFL, Brown people in the audience, the taping is free, you cheap bastards, Indian people don't even act like you're not cheap, you know you're cheap, it's in our blood to be cheap, Jews are cheap, Jews aren't actually cheap, Jew will spend the money, a Jew will grab a shirt, Indian guy, I could probably get this	Indian – 42 South Asian – 1 (Cheap and Indians – 9, Cheap bastards – 1)  White – 29  Chinese – 24 (Sneaky Chinese – 4, Chinaman – 1) Jamaican – 21 Italian – 11 Canadian – 14 Black – 9 Brown – 6 African – 5 Jewish/Jew – 5 Immigrant – 4 Asian - 3 African-American – 1 French – 1 Greek – 1 German – 1 Multicultural – 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repetitive style, which enforces memory</li> <li>He uses less popular culture references, little more general, but links audience together through similar experiences of with ethnic and racial groups vs. Minhaj who does it on the basis of shared adolescence and pop culture</li> <li>Says “in Indian” instead of Hindi as a language</li> <li>Used in perjorative twice (cheap</li> </ul>

	<p>made for \$4, ripping the shirt, we are cheap, it's in our blood, my dad is so good at being cheap, some Asian people, you Chinese, Wu, Wu could be your last name, Chinese and Indian, Indian bargain, Chinese bargain every penny from you, Chinese mall, Indian guy, Chinese guy, Chinese people, Black people in the audience, sensitive Black people, I grew up with Black people you don't scare me, Jamaicans, Jamaicans are hard to grow up with, any Jamaicans here, most passive Jamaicans ever, I am Jamaican, quietest Jamaicans ever, Jamaicans are hard people to grow up around, when I was growing up around Jamaicans, you hang around Jamaican people, you want to be Jamaican, I wanted to be Jamaican, Jamaican, Jamaican, having kids, a Jamaican, Jamaican, Jamaican, Indian, Jamaican, White, Jamaican, Jamaican, African, African, African names, blackjack/African-American jack, African, Brown people, Italians, Italian, Italian, Italian, Italian, Indian, Indiano, no Indiano, no Indiano, no Indiano, Indian people are normal, Indian people, Italian, Italian, Italian, means in Indian (instead of Hindi), Italian, Indian restaurant, Chinese friends, the Chinese guy, you're the Black guy, my Chinese friend, you have a Chinese name, what's your Chinese name, how Chinese people, proper Chinese version, what's the Chinese name, Chinese superhero, Chinaman, chopsticks, noodles, stale fortune</p>	<p>Newfie – 1 You bastards (Home Depot) – 1 Eastern-European – 1</p>	<p>Indian bastards)</p>
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	<p>cookies, Chinese people are smart, tricking us, pretending to speak English, don't be fooled, playing ya, Chinese, Chinese, Chinese, Chinese, Indian, Indian, Indian, Brown, Indian people, Indian, Home Depot people bastards, Indian, Indian accent and cutting tension, Indian, White people, White Canadian, Canadian White, Canadian, Canadian, Canadian, Canadian, Canadian White people, rich Canadian White guy, Canadian, White Canadian people, White Canadian guys, White people, White folks, Brown man, White people, Black, White, Asian, Brown, we fall under Asian as well, South, no more White people, no more Black people, beige, beige, hybrid of Chinese and Indian, Indian, Jamaican, Italian, Indian, Jewish, French, Greek, German, Newfie, Chinese, Chinese, White people, Canadian, Eastern-European, immigrants, immigrant, immigrant, immigrant, Canadian, White, Black, Asian, Brown, multicultural, White, White, Indian, Chinese, Chinese, Indian, Indian, Jamaican, White, Black, Black, White, White, White, White, White, White, White, White, White, our parents, White boy</p>		
References to Other Groups or Categories of People	<p>Gay Indian guys, three gay Indian guys, we are Indian and we are gay, gay South Asian community, they are of the gay, gay Pride, proud and gay, we should not have gay Indians, Indian men should not be gay, we could use a couple of homos, same-sex arranged marriages,</p>	<p>Gay /same-sex – 11 Homo – 10 Other Gay Jokes – 1  Women – 3 Deaf – 2 Fat Jokes – 2</p>	

	Indian family realizes their son is gay, with a good closet, I know she'll a little big now (fat joke), women, women, woman, retarded, all used to be deaf at some point, your mother's so fat, we're not deaf, minority	Minority – 1 Retarded – 1	
Accents	Three gay Indian guys, dad Indian accent (on gay Indian guys), Indian family accent (on same-sex marriage), mom's Indian accent (on marriage), African click accent (on White people), African click accent (on Africa), African (men in the elevator joke), White accent (on slaveowners), Indian accent (Raj the slave), Indian accent (on the NFL), Jewish man accent (on cheapness), Indian accent (on cheapness), Indian accent (on his dad buying a beer), Chinese accent (on cheapness), Chinese accent (on cheapness), Jamaican accent (on passive Jamaicans), Indian accent ("whappening"), dad's Indian accent (on punani), African man accent (on !xobile), African man accent (on !xobile), African woman accent (on !xobile), Italian accent (on Italy), Italian accent (on flip-off gesture), Indian accent (on hands gestures), Chinese accent (on Anthony), Chinese accent (on Hong Kong), Chinese accent (on the Chinese comedian), Indian accent (on Indian accents), Indian accent (on Indian accents), White accent (on Indian accents), Indian accent (on Indian accents), White accent (on Indian accents), Indian accent (on Indian accents) Canadian White people accent (on accents), Indian accent (on an	Indian Accent – 10 Gay Indians – 1 Dad's Accent – 10 Total – 21  Chinese Accent – 6 White Accent – 6 African Accent – 5 Jamaican Accent – 2 Italian – 2 Jewish – 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chinese and White accents are the next most frequent after Indian accent (in the most jokes, versus jokes on other accents are in dedicated sets)</li> </ul>

	Indian-Chinese wedding), dad's Indian accent (on purchasing a couch), Chinese accent (on beating your kids), Dad's Indian accent (on beating your kids), Jamaican accent (on beating your kids), White accent (on his classmate Ryan), White accent (on Ryan's mom)		
Sex	"Live feed", "came on the screen", "Ma I bring nice girls home all the time", "you love woman", "one-gina", "one-gina for the rest of my life", "I started having kids I didn't know about", "punani is a tropical fruit", "punani is the word for a woman's lady parts", "her pumpum", "Hey lady, give me some punani", "Let me squeeze it", sex with !xobile, Indian accent is not good for getting laid, "the jugs on that one", "sooner or later we'll hump you", "ladies sleep around", "if you see that Indian comedian you want to have sex with"	18 references altogether	
Cultural / Pop Culture References	Benetton ad, gay Pride Parade, parade, gay Pride, <i>The Gods Must be Crazy</i> , pop rocks, wholesale, Pacific Mall, bumbacлот, punani, punani, punani, pumpum, punani, casino, blackjack, buffet, Confucius says, Home Depot, redneck, Sunny Tang, Children's Aid, kryptonite, Children's Aid, Children's Aid, Children's Aid	Punani – 4 Children's Aid – 3	
Family	Parents, dad, dad, dad, dad, dad, dad, my parents, mom, ma, mom, mom, mom, my dad, dad, dad, dad, dad, dad, dad, dad, parents, dad, dad, dad, dad, my parents, dad, dad, brother, dad, parents	Dad – 22 Mom/Ma – 5 Parents – 5 Brother – 1	



**Appendix Figure 2** – The coding chart for *Hasan Minhaj: Homecoming King*.

Category	Example	Frequency	Additional Notes
Places	Davis, nah Davis, California, LA, Chicago, New York, A small town in India, Aligarh, that's a small town in India, moving to America, let's move to the US, they come to the States, Pioneer (Elementary School), Stanford, Stanford, they come to the States, move to Davis, California, India, Davis, Brought you to the US, Sacramento, Arden Mall, shut Pioneer down, go back to India, back and forth to India, first birthday in the US, Hindus and Muslims are the Montagues and Capulets of India, Pakistan was created for this reason, this is America, liberate India, Philly, everyone in America, Nebraska, Davis, Nebraska, Davis, Nebraska, New York, New York, New York City, LA, Chicago, Nashville, New York, Manhattan, New York, Chicago, Nashville, LA, LA, Kaiser, New York, Manhattan, New York, LA, New York, New York, New York, New York, I live in LA, I got to back to LA, New York	New York/Manhattan – 12 America/US/The States/United States – 8 India – 7 Davis – 6 LA – 5 Nebraska – 3 California – 2 Chicago – 2 Pioneer – 2 Stanford – 2 Aligarh – 1 Arden – 1 Nashville – 1 Pakistan – 1 Philly – 1 Sacramento – 1	
Cultural / Pop Culture References	Netflix, <i>Lord of the Rings</i> situation, Swiping for love, you work at Subway, that's Tinder with no photos, <i>X-Men: Origins</i> story, mom's a ninja, dad's a communist, M. Night Shyamalan, Saddam Hussein, I'm not Saddam, taxes, Oh Jesus, Velcro shoes,	<i>Only the most notable or frequent ones are listed</i>  Social Media Platforms (Facebook, Snapchat, Tweets, hashtags, Tinder, etc.) – 19 Prom/Dance – 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most are one-time mentions</li> <li>• Keeps it current/timely (peppered with timely sharp pop culture)</li> </ul>

	<p>Guantanamo of the mind, NPR, Ira Glass, <i>The Slap</i>, NBC, spelling bee kid (Arvind Mahankali), Scripps National Spelling Bee, Bobby Jindal, dad software, few apps they're missing, Starbucks, Wi-Fi, freeways, Camry, Camry, Toys 'R' Us, Toys 'R' Us, blue BMX bike, Home Depot, Ghostbusters proton pack, Saddam Hussein, Ghostbuster, Brown Ghostbuster, emo, Drake, visa, condom, Ghostbusters proton backpack, Indian Ghostbuster, hover-hands mode, like Maury for immigrants, build that wall, little Republican, Fruit Roll-ups, Angelina Jolie, quinceañera, Princess Toadstool, tetherball, Ryan Lochte, Toys 'R' Us, blue BMX bike, Home Depot dad, Danny Tanner, PSA, Vietnam, blue BMX bike, anime, Ivy League law school, Hindus and Muslims are the Montagues and Capulets of India, I do yoga, calligraphy, cartoon Ganesh, cartoons, cartoon policy, Hall of Fame Brown dad decision, Camry, Mahatma Gandhi, <i>Jodhaa Akbar</i>, Camry, Philly, Phil Jackson, Internet, World War I, firewall, North Korea, 9/11, Osama, Osama, Camry, Brown Mr. Miyagi, BMX bikes aside, Uncle Sam, Honors Gov, Santa, Costco, 9/11 is a touchy subject, racist <i>Inception</i>, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, JGL, Fair and Lovely, melanin, #blessed,</p>	<p>Jon Stewart – 8 The Daily Show – 7 Fox News (plus people) – 7 Pizza Hut – 7 Camry – 6 AP Calc – 5 Ghostbusters – 5 Bill Maher – 4 BMX Bike – 4 JGL – 3 Saddam Hussein – 3 Toys 'R' US – 3 X-Men, Magneto, Professor X – 3 9/11 – 2 AIM – 2 Batman – 2 Osama – 2 Like a G – 2 Uncle Sam – 2 Ahmed the Clock Kid – 1 All Lives Matter – 1 #blessed – 1 Build that wall – 1 Little Republican – 1 Trayvon Martin – 1</p> <p><i>Brown references thrown in there for the audience:</i> Zee TV – 2 Fair and Lovely – 1 Ganesh - 1 Jodhaa Akbar – 1 Kabhi Khusi Kabhie Gham – 1 Pakoras – 1 Samosa – 1</p> <p>280 References total</p>	<p>references, M. Night Shyamalan, Toys r Us, Tinder, Facebook status updates, Danny Tanner and Full House, Ghostbusters, Ryan Lochte, Inception, being on Accutane, AIM, Boyz II Men, Snapchatting with doggy filter, YOLO, #blessed, Ahmed the Clock kid, police brutality against Black people, Trayvon Martin, All Lives Matter, like a G, finding Wi-Fi, the struggle of dial-up internet, House of Cards, Ebola, Yoda, Voldemort, Liam Neeson, Kanye West, Seinfeld, X-Men)</p>
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	<p>videogame, avatar comes out White, Batman, Batman is White, Presidents are White, Girls, HBO, have fun in med school, had yet to go to a school dance, Accutane, AP Calc, AIM, Boyz II Men, <i>Water Runs Dry</i>, AIM, Snapchatting with your doggy filter, Internet, McMansion, Ford Expansion Eddie Bauer Edition, acoustic guitar, integrals, <i>Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham</i>, Zee TV, Soul cycle, yoga, Zee TV, integrals, like a G, AP Calc, UC Berkeley, Stanford, prom, prom, prom, AP Calc, prom, bracket, March Madness for nerds, like a G, prom, prom, prom, YOLO, prom, JC Penney suit, Michael Jordan cologne, one for each championship, MJ cologne, prom, Mario Kart, Mario Kart, prom, dance, dances are overrated, prom, tools clear history, tools clear history, tools clear history, tools clear history, prom, Uncle Sam, shot in the back 16 times, Trayvon Martin, Ahmed the Clock kid, Fox News, Fox News, spray tans, Fox News, <i>Daily Show</i>, Fox News, Professor X, Magneto, Hannity, Coulter, O'Reilly, halal chicken in rice, racist randy and red sauce, All Lives Matter, shawarma time, Heisenberg Blue, Gotham Comedy Club, Facebook, Yo Facebook, Gotham Comedy Club, flying Southwest, La Quinta Inn, free Wi-Fi, Internet, Facebook, reply son</p>	
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	<p>             reply, Toyota Camry LE, The Comedy Store, The Comedy Store, prom, tools clear history, <i>House of Cards</i>, Pizza Hut new big pizza sliders commercial, March Madness, pizza sliders, screengrab, prom date, Pizza Hut ad, #throwback, #itsasmallworld, #brilliant, #mrp, #Calc, tweet, Facebook rabbit hole, public profile, Facebook profile, direct flight, Pizza Hut money, Kanye juice, Charlie Brown, rent control, prom, ride or die, Voldemort Horcrux, Liam Neeson, co-sign, co-sign, Pizza Hut pizza sliders, Pizza Hut, <i>The Daily Show</i>, Hey Pizza Hut, <i>The Daily Show</i>, Jon Stewart saw the tape, Larry David, <i>Seinfeld</i>, <i>Curb</i>, <i>Real Time with Bill Maher</i>, <i>Real Time with Bill Maher</i>, Bill's general demeanor, Ben Affleck, Bill Maher is like..., Ben Affleck, we got Batman baby, Batman v. Ben Affleck, Ding dong <i>Daily Show</i>, Jon will come down when you're ready, hallway of <i>The Daily Show</i>, Steve Carell, John Oliver, Sam Bee, Jason Jones, Ed Helms, Stephen Colbert, cube life, <i>The Daily Show</i> globe, MCAT, DA, off to the Caribbean, IA, Jewish Yoda, its Jon, I am Jon Stewart, twenty-two time Emmy Award winning Jon Stewart, Pizza Hut, Eight Mile, Russian gymnast, Its Jon, Oscar speech go, Jon this is one of the few, Jon my dad           </p>		
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	knows you, you're not JGL, <i>The Daily Show</i> , status update, laptop, Facebook, Ebola		
Hindi Language References	<p>Red lehenga, I'm Najme, Najme marries Question Mark, salwar kameez, Hasan Bhai, Hasan Bhai, Hasan Bhai, Hasan Bhai, what's Hasan Bhai, Hasan Bhai, Aisha, Aisha, Aisha, Hasan Bhai, baas ek chakka maar, Hasan Bhai come back, her chappals, Hasan Bhai, tune aisa kyun kiya, Aisha, OMG Hasan Bhai, biryani, Aisha, log kya kahenge, log kya kahenge, log kya kahenge, log kya kahenge, log kya kahenge, be an acha bacha, Aisha, Hasan Bhai, Hasan Bhai, Kya bole hain?, darpook, ghar ke baat, log kya kahenge, Aap na naraz kyun hai?, yeh cheez toh hoti hain, tum kabhi nahin samajhe, samosa, hamari khandan, pakoras, when is the shaadi, main tumhara moor tor dunga, bechara, log kya kahenge, Hasan Bhai, Aisha, tune aisa kiya kyun kiya, himmat hone chaaye poem, how easy is my name Hasan Minhaj, darpook, gore people, you're not Hasan Minhaj you're "Hassan Minhajj", Aisha, Keema roti me?, IA (inshallah), Jewish Najme, you're Hasan Minhaj</p> <p>Rajesh Rengatramanajananam, Rajesh Rengatramanajananam, how many letters are in Rajesh</p>	<p>Hasan Bhai – 14 Full phrases (minus log kya kahenge) – 11 Aisha – 8 Log kya kahenge – 7 Hasan Minhaj – 3 Najme – 3 Darpook – 2 IA – 1</p> <p><i>Rajesh</i> <i>Rengatramanajananam:</i> Full name – 10 times Raj – 2 Mr. Rengatramanajananam – 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Always mentions Raj's full name to reinforce his Indianness</li> </ul>

	<p>Rengatramanajanam, I want Rajesh</p> <p>Rengatramanajanam, give me the Rajesh</p> <p>Rengatramanajanam, how does she make love to Rajesh</p> <p>Rengatramanajanam, oh my God Rajesh</p> <p>Rengatramanajanam, you Rajesh</p> <p>Rengatramanajanam, your Rajesh</p> <p>Rengatramanajanam, stop imagining her having sex with Rajesh</p> <p>Rengatramanajanam, what about Mr.</p> <p>Rengatramanajanam, Raj is a good person, me, you, and Raj should hang out</p>		
<p>Racial and Ethnic Categories / Other Groups of People / Racial Slurs</p>	<p>Anybody Brown, immigrants love secrets, two Brown dudes trying to make it, Brown love is conditional, Davis was super White, only Brown kid at school, only Brown guy at work, immigrant fathers, wake up any immigrant father, what any Brown parents would do, liberal White guilt, immigrants aren't going to hit, Americans hit kids on the arm, immigrants slap the arm, White kid, Brown kids get slapped, every Brown birthday party, Indian kid winning the spelling bee, Indian sociopath, every immigrant father, immigrant car of choice, marry a White girl, Brown Ghostbuster, put on Indian clothes, Indian ghostbuster, little Brown girl, immigrants love secrets, like Maury for immigrants, I</p>	<p>Brown – 22</p> <p>White – 18</p> <p>Immigrants – 14</p> <p>Muslims – 9</p> <p>Indian – 7</p> <p>Hindu – 6</p> <p>FOB – 2</p> <p>British – 2</p> <p>Refugee – 2</p> <p>Sand Nigger – 2</p> <p>African-Americans – 1</p> <p>Americans – 1</p> <p>Arabs – 1</p> <p>Dune Coon – 1</p> <p>Hindi – 1</p> <p>Japanese – 1</p> <p>Jehovah's Witness – 1</p> <p>Korean – 1</p> <p>Mexicans – 1</p> <p>New Brown America</p> <p>The Other – 1</p> <p>Russian – 1</p> <p>Yokels – 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brown vs. Indian vs. immigrant?</li> <li>• We don't know he's Muslim until he mentions he married a Hindu girl, it's just understood by the way he says it</li> <li>• Stops mentioning Brownness and immigrants after a certain point, after establishing content, doesn't keep reminding audience unless it's</li> </ul>

	<p>hated that Brown girl so much, these Brown people, this FOB in a frock, Brown mothers, every single Brown mother, eat my dust immigrant, refugee baby to entertain White people, she's not a refugee, married a girl from a Hindu family, Hindus and Muslims are the Montagues and Capulets of India, Hindus and Muslims, Hindu's don't eat beef, Muslims don't eat pork, Hindus like statues, Muslim's don't like statues, Hindus like cartoons, Muslims don't like cartoons, Hall of Fame Brown dad decision, there's Brown dads here, killer of every Brown kid's dream, every time a Brown father says, stand up to the British, the British will talk shit about us, I resented that Brown girl for years, "our parents," "that's the way they are," Don't tell people you're Muslim, sand nigger, dune coon, Brown Mr. Miyagi, like a lot of immigrants, as immigrants we always have to put on press releases, no one loves this country more than immigrants, I want to be White, avatar comes out White, Batman is White, presidents are White, privilege debate for White people, he's an immigrant father, walking around like an Indian rooster, my parents are arguing in Hindi, the fobbiest thing ever, I love you my White princess, Jehovah's Witness girl, Korean</p>		<p>fully and completely relevant, builds relatability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White people are White, no other ethnicity is mentioned</li> </ul>
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	exchange students, yes my White princess, kissed a White girl, toothless yokels, sand nigger, African-American brothers and sisters, idea of the Other, people of colour, Mexicans, Arabs, dating an Indian dude, he's Indian as fuck, you guys knew she was White right?, it went Whiter than White, I couldn't date another White person, like the colour of my skin, New Brown America, Muslim people, Japanese, you're my White prince, to back the Muslim community, the hero the Muslim world needs, Jewish Yoda, Jewish Najme, Russian gymnast, Once you go Brown you gotta lock that shit down		
American Dream	American Dream, American Dream Tax, this is the American Dream, American Dream	4 mentions	